

STATEMENT OF GOVERNOR HALEY BARBOUR

Governor Barbour's "Healthy Kids" Initiative Protects Mississippi's Kids from Tobacco and Drugs

The health of Mississippi's kids is at risk from many factors, whether it is cigarette smoking or exposure to illegal drugs. Mississippi needs and deserves a constitutional and comprehensive plan to prevent our kids from getting hooked on tobacco just as Mississippi needs to beef up our efforts to stop our kids from getting hooked on drugs. We can do both with the \$20 million which has been unconstitutionally diverted to the Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi annually since December 22, 2000.

As I've said in the past, the Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi has done some good work, but Mississippi's taxpayers have not gotten their money's worth for the \$100 million the Partnership has spent, an annual amount twice as much as Mississippi spends fighting the scourge of illegal drugs.

There has never been an accounting of how the Partnership has spent this \$100 million given to the Legislature, the Governor, the Health Care Trust Fund Board, or the taxpayers. While it is claimed that the Partnership is audited, no certified audit of the Partnership's use of the state's money has ever been provided.

Even without the benefit of a comprehensive, independent audit of the Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi, there is no denying there has been waste and abuse of taxpayer dollars by the organization. For example, the Partnership spent \$20,000 on a newspaper ad that ran in newspapers across the state that had nothing to do with keeping youth from smoking. Instead, it was an ad praising former Attorney General Mike Moore for winning an award. In addition, the Partnership has awarded monetary grants which are tinged with politics such as the \$2.9 million given by the Partnership to the Legislative Black Caucus' foundation. These actions question whether the Partnership's priorities are more focused on politics than on stopping kids from smoking.

Mississippi's taxpayers should not have to rely on an unaccountable private organization like the Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi to fight youth smoking. Mississippi needs a new, comprehensive approach to fighting tobacco, and the diseases it causes, which builds on the things the Partnership has done well, but includes oversight to prevent the waste, abuse, and politicizing of public health efforts.

Recent legislative proposals and comments by the Chairman of the Partnership's Board, Mike Moore, indicate there is agreement that taxpayer money used by the Partnership must be appropriated by the Legislature and not unconstitutionally diverted by a Jackson County Chancery Court. All these monies must be deposited in the Health Care Trust Fund and then appropriated.

I have advocated the \$20 million be appropriated for Medicaid, since the federal government would then match the \$20 million on a more than 3 to 1 basis, generating a total of more than \$80 million of health care spending for Mississippi's children.

Today, in light of Medicaid's improved financial condition, I propose a constitutional and comprehensive program to reduce youth smoking and to fight the scourge of illegal drugs, while improving health care not only for our school children but for all Mississippians.

In this session, the Legislature should appropriate the previously diverted \$20 million out of the Health Care Expendable Fund for the following purposes:

- Expand the School Nurse Program

Currently, more than 60 school nurses who implement tobacco prevention programs serve more than 50 school districts. This program's capabilities for education and outreach will be doubled by appropriating \$5 million to the Mississippi Department of Health.

- Maintain Anti-Tobacco Education and Advertising

We will continue to educate our children about the dangers of tobacco use by appropriating \$5 million to the Mississippi Department of Health for a coordinated advertising campaign to educate our children about the health risks of tobacco use. The Department of Health can contract with the same firms that do the marketing/advertising campaigns for the Partnership, if it chooses.

- Expand Cancer Research, Screening, Education, and Treatment

One of the University of Mississippi Medical Center Cancer Institute's primary research focuses is on the treatment and eventual cure of lung cancer. An appropriation of \$5 million to the University of Mississippi Medical Center will support the development of this Cancer Institute, enabling the Cancer Institute to continue to recruit nationally recognized scientists and support their research activities, while supporting day-to-day programs for cancer screening and education across the state.

- Increase the State's Support for the Fight Against Drugs

There is no greater health threat to Mississippi's children than illegal narcotics and drug crime. An additional \$5 million for the Bureau of Narcotics will increase the state's support for the fight against drugs and provide 50% more narcotics agents to investigate and arrest the drug dealers who prey on our children.

- Ensure Annual Accountability of All Funds

These appropriations should be reviewed each year by the Legislature to assess the effectiveness of the programs and to revisit the priorities in the context of the overall state budget. Where possible and eligible for federal 3 to 1 matching funds, all programs should be provided through Medicaid funds to maximize the benefits derived from the \$20 million.